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ABSTRACT

The problem of underprepared high school students in Washington State who wish to go to college, some possible causes for academic decline, and potential solutions to the problem are considered. Evidence of deficiencies are cited as follows: a decline in students' college admission test scores over the past 17 years; results of minimum competency tests; and a gap between university new academic standards and actual student preparation at Eastern Washington University. It is suggested that the nature of the relationship between the elementary and secondary levels and higher education is necessary for any exploration of transition to college. Five activities are suggested for the elementary-secondary system: implement competency testing; strengthen course offerings; improve students' study skills; tighten graduation requirements; and strengthen disciplinary, attendance, and retention practices. At the college level, the following suggestions are addressed: (1) strengthen admission requirements; (2) restrict the location and proliferation of remedial education; and (3) increase the emphasis on training highly qualified educational personnel. Secondary-postsecondary collaboration is suggested to solve the problem of underprepared students. (SW)

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STATE OF WASHINGTON
COUNCIL FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Committee on Academic Affairs
May 18, 1982

(Revised)

PLANNING ISSUE PAPER NO. 3: High School to College Transition

Introduction

Any transition from one stage or activity to another may take several forms. It can be smooth or erratic, easy or difficult, immediate or extended, and so on. All of these possibilities, and others, apply to the movement from high school to college. For many college students entry into higher education is delayed either by choice or necessity. Special programs for older students and increases in the average age of students in some institutions or sectors attest to the presence of people whose education was delayed or interrupted, and it is likely that their enrollment percentage will increase in the future. The transition for these students involves much more than a passage from secondary to higher education. Their needs and problems are an issue in themselves.

For the student making the transition directly from high school to college, the expectations, the structure, the style of teaching, the living arrangements, also may be different from what has been experienced. What students bring to cope and achieve in this new setting is derived from their prior educational experiences and other features of their socialization, socioeconomic status, and innate capacities. Academically, one can look for evidence of this background in such indicators as the types of courses taken in high school, the grade average, performance on college aptitude tests, and other formal evidence of intellectual accomplishment and readiness. These indicators are presumed to assure confidence in the student's abilities to do college-level work. There is but a single question about the transition from high school to college that leads one to

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look for such supporting evidence of ability--has the student attained the level of academic competency needed to achieve his/her educational objectives and succeed at that institution? It is this question that comprises the major issue of this paper.

There are many students, perhaps even most students, for whom the answer is strongly affirmative. But, successful students rarely capture the attention of the community and its analysts, especially when evidence of other students who are not so well prepared is widespread and seemingly increasing. A committee of faculty members from all public colleges and universities in California recently identified the lack of preparation of students as their principal concern.* Similar concerns also were voiced by faculty at the University of Washington** and other institutions in this state. Although faculty always have expressed dissatisfaction with entering students' abilities, there is renewed concern about declining academic quality, in this case directed toward the level of academic preparation in high school and the academic accommodations in college.

Evidence of Deficiencies

One of the most frequently cited indicators of deficiencies in academic preparation for college is the seventeen-year decline in students' college admission test scores. Average verbal scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test's (SAT's) 200 to 800 scale declined annually from 478 in 1963 to 424 in 1980, and average mathematical scores declined from 502 to 466.***

While from two-thirds to three-fourths of the score decline during the pre-1970 period may be accounted for by significant changes in the test-taking population and increases in the number of persons with typically lower than average scores, the implications of the SAT results cannot be so readily dismissed. Even accounting for different student populations and

*Jack McCurdy, "California Professors Recommend Program to Improve Skills of College-Bound Students," The Chronicle of Higher Education, December 2, 1981, p. 6.

**Agenda, University of Washington Faculty Senate Meeting of Thursday, January 21, 1982, Resolution, p. 2.

***The College Board, Project Equality, 1981.

an overall increase in the number of college-bound students, the conclusion remains that skills, as measured by SAT's, have declined. Washington's own testing program, the Washington Pre-College Test (WPCT), has registered similar findings.*

In spring, 1980, as part of a pilot project, the University of Washington tested 1,000 college-bound seniors from 152 Washington high schools to determine how many were able to demonstrate the proficiencies required to do college-level work at that institution. More than one-third failed basic English composition and mathematics tests reinforcing faculty " concerns about limitations in the mathematics and English composition skills of college-bound students."** In spring, 1981, minimum competency tests taken by almost seven thousand junior and senior high school students in Seattle produced even more dismal results: only about 55 percent passed both parts of the reading and mathematics exam.***

Faculty and administrators at Eastern Washington University have been concerned for some time about the preparation level of entering students. This issue has been addressed directly since 1977 during the development of EWU's new General University Requirements, which were implemented in Fall, 1981. Under the new GUR's, students are required to demonstrate proficiency in basic mathematics and English composition. Students who fail to do so are assigned to remedial courses designed to bring them up to the desired levels.

The results of EWU's Fall 1981 experience indicate that a substantial gap exists between its new academic standards and actual student preparation. About 60 percent of EWU's fall, 1981 freshman class were assigned to a remedial mathematics class after failing to demonstrate proficiency in basic arithmetic, algebra, and/or geometry. According to EWU's coordinator

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*Washington Pre-College Testing Program, "A Ten-Year Study of Test Scores for College-Bound Students in the State of Washington," 1979, p. 3. The WPCT, used statewide for admission and placement purposes, indicates that 1977 was the low point for measurements of students' quantitative abilities; verbal ability indicators have remained relatively constant since 1973.

**"College-Bound Students Flunk Basic Tests," Eugene Register-Guard, March 15, 1981.

***Susan Goldberg, "Seattle Students Fall Down on Skills Test," Seattle Post-Intelligencer, January 22, 1982, p. A4.

of General University Requirements, the remedial mathematics class is a self-paced individualized offering:

> Some students assigned to it brought their mathematics skills up to the required level in a few weeks. Many, however, were not able to do so within one quarter and needed to continue in the course for at least part of an additional quarter. It appears that something less than half of those requiring mathematics remediation will have received it by the end of their freshman year, primarily because of our inability to offer sufficient space in the remedial course (21 sections were offered). Persuading students to enroll in the course as early as possible in their academic careers presents an additional problem.*

Although only 25 percent of the 1981 entering freshmen were assigned to EWU's remedial English composition course (33 sections were offered), EWU's Coordinator of General University Requirements reports that a number of years ago the freshman course, English 101, was itself considered remedial. "Most faculty consider the sophomore course, English 201, to be the first genuine college-level composition offering."

Students appear to be aware of their skill deficiencies. Many feel their levels of academic preparedness will need improvement as they enter college. Forty-two percent of the 26,017 seniors taking the Washington Pre-College Test in 1978 said they wanted help in developing their mathematics skills, and about one-third wanted help with written English and study skills. Although almost 9,000 of the 26,017 seniors expressed a desire to enroll in a public regional college or university the following fall, only 3,250 did so. The majority enrolled in a community college instead.** Obviously, much plan-changing can be attributed to economic factors, but

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*Letter from Steven B. Christopher, Coordinator of General University Requirements, Office of Academic Affairs, Eastern Washington University, March 16, 1982.

**COLLEGE-BOUND SENIORS' COLLEGE TYPE PREFERENCE AND COLLEGE TYPE ATTENDED:

	Type Preferred	Type Attended	
Community College	5,984	12,255	+104.8%
Four-Year State College or Regional University	8,846	3,252	-172.0%
State University	5,984	6,091	+ 1.8%

Source: Richard Noeth, Career Experiences, Plans, and Academic Characteristics of Washington 1979 College-Bound Seniors, Washington Pre-College Testing Program, 1979.

some may result from the students' more realistic assessments of their abilities to meet college academic demands.

When underprepared students seek to enter college, the institutions must find some way to adjust to the absence of necessary skills and background. The refusal of admission to these students is one such adjustment, but for a variety of reasons it appears to be employed less often than student preparedness would seem to warrant. The methods of public funding, the declining numbers of entering students after a decade of expansion, the institutional impetus to respond to students seeking higher education, all combine to lead colleges to find other means, besides refusal of admission, for adapting to under-prepared enrollees.

The provision of developmental or remedial courses and services has been the most widely adopted response of institutions attempting to increase student academic skills to minimally acceptable levels. Nationwide, developmental or remedial education, reported to be the fastest growing curriculum in American colleges and universities in 1979, registered a more substantial increase in the number of courses offered between 1979 and 1980 than any single discipline except nursing and allied health.* The expansion of remedial courses and services is not entirely the result of lowered student skills; it derives to some extent from open admissions, policies to increase access to educationally disadvantaged students and women, grade inflation,** an increased emphasis on retaining students, and on providing them with assistance for a range of learning needs. However, it also is undeniably linked with changes in the abilities of students to perform college-level work.

In February, 1981, the Council received the results of the staff's Academic Skill Development Survey of Washington's colleges and universities. The findings of that survey, while not conclusive, indicated that, in keeping with the national trend, remedial education also may be expanding in this state, particularly at the community college level, although not limited to that level. All institutions participating in the survey

*Jack Magarrell, "Colleges Offered Fifteen Percent More Courses This Year, Survey Finds; Remedial Courses Increase 22 Percent," The Chronicle of Higher Education, June 1, 1981, pp. 1, 7-8.

**Martha Maxwell, Improving Student Learning Skills. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1979.

provided remedial services, and many indicated increasing and unmet demand for such offerings.

Some Possible Causes for Academic Decline

An understanding of the nature of the relationship between the K-12 and higher education sectors is necessary for any exploration of the movement from one to the other. The K-12 sector and the higher education sector are components of a larger system of universal education. As parts of a whole, the primary, secondary, and higher schools are in frequent interaction. The secondary schools are to some extent dependent on the elementary schools to prepare their students, and similarly, the colleges look to the secondary schools for the preparation of theirs; and both the elementary and secondary schools turn to the colleges for preparation of teachers and administrators. Alterations in the aspects of this relationship by one participant require accommodating alterations by the other(s), which, in turn, create additional needs for modification by the initial change producer, and so on. In biology, relationships like this are labeled "symbiotic," in that each participant derives something from and is mutually reliant on the actions of the other(s).

This systemic style of mutual interdependency gives insight into the effects and ramifications of declining standards in any one of the educational systems' components. Within such an interdependent system, the question of which part is to blame for declines in academic preparation may be unanswerable. What is worth consideration is an examination of those internal and external circumstances and characteristics that lead to the continuation of the problem.

Virtually everyone is aware that the movement of students through the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary school systems constitutes one vast social process, yet this interrelationship is often ignored. Little effort has been directed toward understanding and enlarging the scope of the total educational process. And interests of individual students and individual institutions have become the dominant forces. Although a number of factors contribute to the unpreparedness of today's college students, primary among these, many educators believe, is the failure of K-12 and higher education to develop into a system with closely interrelated parts.

One frequently cited example of how non-communication between the secondary and postsecondary education sectors contributes to student unpreparedness is the failure on the part of colleges to clearly communicate to parents, students, and secondary school personnel exactly what it is that students need to know in order to do college-level work. Often, catalogs simply state that a certain number of courses are recommended or required for admission. Little emphasis is given to course content or the achievement of competence. Faculty committees in California, Ohio, and Wisconsin have found that simply requiring a certain number of academic courses for college admissions is not enough to assure proficiency and that "specific competencies requisite for successful baccalaureate level study" should be identified and clearly communicated to all prospective students.*

The availability of opportunities in college to make up differences between high school achievement and college expectations is another significant contributor to the continuation of problems in academic preparation. Despite all their beneficial and laudable purposes, the ready availability of college-based remedial assistance gives no support to collegiate claims of high academic skill expectations and no signal to the secondary schools that better qualified students are required. Both college and high school personnel report that high school students aren't concerned about their academic preparation because they know they can make up deficiencies in college.

The adequate preparation of teachers and administrators is a continuing theme in any evaluation of the effectiveness of the educational system. According to Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the quality of the nation's schools "can rise no higher than the quality of teaching."** Respondents in the 1980 Gallup Poll of attitudes toward the public schools share this opinion. In response to a request for suggestions of "ways to improve education in your community," they gave top priority to "Well educated (trained) teachers and

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*McCurdy, ibid.

**"Educator Sees Classroom Crisis." Daily Olympian, January 21, 1982.

principals." Their second priority also is significant--"Emphasis on basic education."*

Jerome Bruner, an eminent developmental psychologist, was interviewed recently about the condition of education today. In Bruner's view, today's schools have failed because they have made education seem like a "handout." "If the school shows that it cares, the students care. They respond with regular attendance, better behavior, and higher academic achievement. . . . It's something on the order to establishing a contract," he says, "we work; you work."**

The most consistent finding in the majority of studies of school effectiveness is the crucial connection between expectations and achievement. Well-administered schools with well-articulated goals, high faculty expectations, discipline, and evaluation, are among the principal elements of academic success. Within the scope of the academic environment, students who achieve are expected to achieve first by their principals and second by their teachers.*** When the nation's 1980 high school sophomores were asked for their views of schooling today, they cited their own poor study habits, poor teaching, and too easy coursework as the primary inhibitors of their ability to learn.****

A number of Washington education professionals have lamented the dilution of the high school diploma by the proliferation of courses with questionable academic content and demand. This is coupled with absence of many courses once considered essential for college preparedness. In 1979, almost one-half of Washington's high schools did not offer trigonometry, and almost one-quarter did not offer chemistry or physics.*****

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*George H. Gallup, "The 13th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." Phi Delta Kappan, September 1981.

**Jerome Bruner, "Schooling Children in a Nasty Climate," Psychology Today, January, 1982, pp. 56-63.

***Joan Shoemaker and Hugh W. Fraser, "What Principals Can Do: Some Implications From Studies of Effective Schooling," Phi Delta Kappan, November, 1981, pp. 178-182.

****"High School and Beyond," a survey of 27,429 seniors and 30,030 sophomores, nationwide, and 3,645 seniors and sophomores in 65 schools in Washington (1980). National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 1981.

*****Elden Egbers, Math Supervisor, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, January, 1982.

Finally, the frequent reports of students graduating from high school illiterate and without basic mathematical skills must be noted. Grade inflation is one explanation for this, a factor which makes it difficult for college admissions officers to rely on what was a previously acceptable G.P.A. as indicative of the student's true accomplishments. A second explanation is the use of social promotions as a means to advance from one grade level to another and the graduation of students who give no evidence by their actions that they want to learn.

Colleges, like high schools, also have been criticized for maintaining weakened academic curricula and engaging in grade inflation. While many courses still demand a high degree of skills, the variety of routes available to a degree make it possible for some students to continue in college with few demands on their academic competencies. Remedial courses may be dominated by freshmen, but they also enroll a surprising number of more advanced students, students who despite academic skill deficiencies have completed one or more years of college-level work.

Outside of the educational system itself, larger societal changes also are contributors to academic skill declines. Television is a frequent target of educational critics, with American families now watching television an average of six hours a day.* Of perhaps greater significance than time lost to studying and more academicially oriented pursuits, such as reading, may be the changes television has made in the way today's students approach learning and problem solving. One educational commentator has critiqued TV's effect on schools as one which encourages passive learning and reduces one's ability to conceptualize and reflect.** The changing familial structure and the increasing incidence of employment for both parents also have altered the environment in which children learn and receive support for academic endeavors.

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*Jane Mayer, "Some Cried a Lot, But Youths Survived Week Without TV," Wall Street Journal, January 6, 1982, p. 1.

**Neil Postman, Teaching as a Conserving Activity, New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1979.

Some Possible Responses

The difficulties and declines outlined on the preceding pages, to a considerable extent, have been the result of efforts to respond to a larger, more diverse student population, and to facilitate the transition from high school to college. The ramifying effect of declines in preparation in one segment of the educational system has reached the point where communities, policymakers, and educators all agree on the need to intervene. It is clearly time to seek out ways in which the levels of academic skills will be pulled or pushed upward rather than allowed to continue to deteriorate. But when one talks about upgrading academic preparation, it also is necessary to talk in economic and physical realities. How can students' academic preparation be improved without increased expenditures? What can be accomplished within the confines of the present educational structure? And how can this be accomplished while retaining the very important benefits of increased access and participation? There are no immediate or satisfactory answers to these questions. However, there are a number of responses, many already beginning, which taken together may prove effective.

The following suggestions center on two objectives:

1) to increase the level of academic preparation in the secondary schools; and

2) to increase the level of expectations in the postsecondary schools.

While academic achievement in only one sector would stimulate action in the other, the most rapid and effective means of improvement would be achieved by the coordinated and cooperative efforts of both. What follows represents the approaches most often suggested by educational observers and by educators themselves--those approaches which already may be in process.

In the K-12 system, five activities are offered for consideration:

1) implement competency testing;

2) strengthen course offerings;

3) improve students' study skills;

4) tighten graduation requirements;

5) strengthen disciplinary, attendance, and retention practices.

Other possibilities, such as improved advising and career counseling, more positive and applicable vocational education programs, and more community and parental participation also should be considered but are not discussed here.

1) Implement Competency Testing. A move to reemphasize basic education and to demand assurance that unqualified students do not receive promotions or graduate from high school swept the nation in the 1970's. Now, nearly 40 states,* including Washington, have implemented versions of what are commonly called "minimum competency tests" in an effort to make educational accountability a major policy.

Unlike standardized achievement tests, minimum competency tests do not measure proficiency in higher level thinking skills such as interpretative and inferential reading comprehension;** rather, they measure the student's ability to apply basic skills in everyday situations. Washington's Student Learning Objectives (SLO) Law (RCW 28A.58.090) requires that local school districts implement an SLO-based program for reading, language arts, and mathematics in grades K-12 by 1981, and that student performance be assessed annually in all subject areas by 1986. (The use made of test score information is at the option of the local school district.)***

Critics of minimum competency tests argue that it is an expensive, time-consuming process. Further, when success is measured solely by examinations, teaching and learning can become "test-oriented." They also argue that minimum competency test results have no statistical reliability, because it is basic skills like reading and mathematics**** which are taught in the schools, not proficiency in using these skills. Proponents

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*Mary Lou Ensign, "Minimum Competency Testing: Where Are We Going?" Center Point, Seattle: Citizens Education Center Northwest, Spring 1982, p. 1.

** Ibid.

***Legislative Budget Committee, Performance Audit: Student Learning Objectives Program and Washington State Testing Program, November, 1980.

****Spruiell White, President, Seattle Urban League; from Susan Goldberg, "Seattle Students Fall Down on Skills Test," ibid.

claim that competency testing is one of the better means for educators to identify the need for individual remediation and to determine if the curriculum achieves the institution's or district's instructional goals.

While it is too early to tell if minimum competency testing can ensure a better educational product, one education observer predicts that if citizens and educators work together to establish and operate appropriate programs, and if protections are built into competency testing "so that students alone do not bear the burden of skills mastery," the following benefits could accrue:

> A minimum competency testing program can create a public dialogue regarding high school graduation standards; restore meaning to the high school diploma; ensure that students who have difficulty receive appropriate instruction; and improve public attitudes toward public schools.*

2. Strengthen Course Offerings by Reducing the Number of Courses Available to High School Students so they make fewer academically unrelated course choices. The Testing and Evaluation Section of the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is currently conducting a "high school course offerings and enrollment study." This effort to collect data on various subject offerings among the schools' total curriculum; i.e., the number of courses by subject matter and the number of students enrolled, will enable the State Board of Education and local school districts to compare trends in existing course offerings with overall instructional objectives. One question that may be answered, for example: Are the resources being directed toward the various instructional areas compatible with education priorities? The findings, scheduled to be made available to the State Board of Education in September, 1982, could lead to the modification of existing educational practice.

3. Improve Students' Study Skills. Students and educators alike believe that the development of successful study skills is essential to student learning and the achievement of students' educational objectives. The definitions of six basic academic competencies needed to do college-level work are currently being circulated by The College Board for

*Ensign, ibid.

consideration by schools and colleges, public authorities, and the public at large. Of the six competencies--reading, writing, speaking and listening, mathematical, reasoning, and studying--the ability to study is seen as the foundation of learning:

> This set of abilities is different in kind from those which precede it. They are set forth here because they constitute the key abilities in learning how to learn. Successful study skills are necessary for aquiring the other five competencies as well as for achieving the desired outcomes. Students are unlikely to be efficient in any part of their work without them.*

Within Washington, there is universal agreement that the development of student study skills is a critical component of the educational improvement process. While a number of high schools and colleges have instituted study-skills courses, teacher education programs, which focus more effectively on developing students' study skills and on demonstrating how study skill instruction can be incorporated into every course, are viewed as the source of real improvement.

4. Tighten High School Graduation Requirements. Dr. Frank Brouillet, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, recently proposed to the State Board of Education (January 15, 1982) that increasing the state's minimum graduation requirements could greatly strengthen the high school programs in Washington. A survey of 362 Washington high schools, conducted by the Testing and Evaluation Section of SPI, however, indicates that the average graduation requirements established at the local level already exceed those that reasonably might be imposed by the State Board.

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*The College Board, Preparation for College in The 1980s; The Basic Academic Competencies and the Basic Academic Curriculum. Project Equality, November, 1981.

STATE BOARD MINIMUM COURSE/CREDIT REQUIREMENTS*

Course	Credits	Total Local Credits Required (Average)
English	6	10.1
Mathematics	3	4.7
Social Studies:		
U.S. History and Government	2	3.1
Washington State History and Government	1	1.4
Contemporary World History, Geography and Problems	2	3.3
Laboratory Science	2	3.6
Occupational Education	3	4.0
Physical Education (2 yrs., 90 mins./week)	1	5.1
Elective Courses	25	25.0
Additional Course Requiremts.	0	4.5
Total Credit Requirement	45	61.6

If course/credit requirements were an accurate measure of educational attainment, virtually every graduate of Washington's high schools would be qualified to enter college without the need for educational remediation. Unfortunately, evidence exists to the contrary. Clearly, it is the responsibility of the State Board of Education to provide leadership in identifying the basic high school curriculum, but unless required courses are tied to recognized competencies, the action of increasing the minimum graduation requirements could be ineffectual.

5. Strengthen Disciplinary, Attendance, and Retention Practices.

Many educators believe that as long as the public schools lack the machinery to extricate truly reluctant learners from the educational process, the problem of unprepared students entering college will not be resolved. The public schools, they argue, cannot refuse admission to

*"Survey of High School Graduation Requirements in Washington State," a preliminary report, SPI, February, 1982.

students who say they want to come to school but give no evidence by their actions that they want to learn. The system, they say, is philosophically at odds with keeping everyone in school and maintaining academic expectations and discipline.

A recent survey of many of the nation's 1980 high school sophomores and seniors found that students also view the educational system as unchallenging. Students reported that they don't like working hard in school, they do little, if any, homework, and they think much coursework is too easy. (They also report they frequently cut classes, don't attend school, and talk back to teachers. About two-thirds of the 1980 seniors perceive discipline in their schools to be both unfair and ineffective.)*

Two responses have been suggested by educators to release participants in the educational process from a reactive mode. The first suggests that students who are unable or unwilling to meet certain academic requirements should continue to be promoted from grade to grade and graduated from high school, but that a system of "differentiated certification" should be established in order to make life easier for teachers and both motivated and unmotivated students. The second suggestion assumes that few students, given appropriate and effective responses to their learning problems, lack the desire or ability to meet basic academic requirements. Because the immediate interests and concerns of some students may not match their long-range interests and needs, it is up to the schools, with the support of superintendents, school boards, parents, and the community, to ensure that all students graduating from high school have obtained the essentials of a liberal education.

There is little question that implementing the preceding suggestions would increase the meaning and substance of the high school curriculum and improve students' academic skills, but educators suggest that Washington's colleges and universities could take action to increase student preparedness as well. The suggested actions for higher education are:

1) strengthen admission requirements;
2) restrict the location and proliferation of remedial education;
3) increase the emphasis on training highly qualified educational personnel.

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*"High School and Beyond," ibid.

1) Strengthen Admission Requirements. According to a recent article in the Phi Delta Kappan, a number of universities will soon require students to complete more and, in some cases, better academic courses in high school in order to qualify for admission. Educators in California, Ohio and Wisconsin are exerting strong efforts to make up for past lapses in high school-college communication. The academic senates of the University of California, the California State University System, and the California Community Colleges, for example, have increased the number of academic courses students are required to complete in order to qualify for college admission and have adopted a statement of academic competencies that should be expected of students who want to succeed in college. Reports have gone out to schools, teachers, counselors, parents, and students, specifying the skills and knowledge requisite for successful baccalaureate-level study.*

A move in a similar direction has begun in Washington. In Fall, 1984, the University of Washington, for the first time, will require entering students to have completed three years of high school mathematics, including algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. The UW Faculty Senate also has considered, but tabled a proposal, that entering students be required to take proficiency tests in writing, mathematics, and foreign languages. Eastern Washington University now expects incoming students to demonstrate proficiency in English and mathematics or enroll in remedial courses.

Most high school personnel have greeted these more stringent admission requirements with favor, since they encourage students to enroll in more academically demanding courses. Others, among them William Spady of the American Association of School Administrators, are hopeful but believe that "as long as competence is defined by time spent in school, letter grades, and class rank, real competence will be elusive."** Like Spady, the Oregon Educational Coordinating Commission considers the development of statements of competencies, alone, insufficient for students who come to college from high schools with curricular offerings ranging from limited to complex. The Commission, therefore, has recommended that the Oregon Board of Higher

*Jack McCurdy, "Sending The Message: New Admissions Standards for a New Decade," Phi Delta Kappan, April, 1982, pp. 547-550.
** Ibid.

Education establish levels of academic mastery which must be demonstrated by students admitted to Oregon's four-year institutions.

2) Restrict the Location and Proliferation of Remedial Education. The 1981 Academic Skill Development Survey by the Council staff concluded that while none of Washington's four-year institutions were yet in a position where their educational quality was threatened by the provision of remedial services, those services should not expand without restrictions. The cost of such services alone, both in terms of money and in their disruption of the college instructional process, should lead to further consideration of their appropriateness on all college campuses.

A number of methods are suggested which could reduce the need for remedial courses. All, however, recognize that the current need for remedial education is so extensive that any plan for addressing the issue must be phased in to avoid "system shock." Further, even if every student who went directly from high school to college were fully prepared academically, the need for remedial instruction would not be eliminated. Learning assistance support programs must continue to be available at the postsecondary level in order to accommodate students who, for whatever reason, do not fit the desired academic standard.

One model has recently been implemented in Louisiana for reducing the cost of helping students to remediate their deficiencies and increasing the numbers who are retained to graduation.* The plan adopted by the Louisiana Board of Regents provides the required developmental offerings at the college and university level over the short term, with the long-term goal of reducing the percentage of developmental students coming from high schools from 40 to 20 percent. The basic elements of the Louisiana program for developmental education in colleges and universities are as follows: actively work with high schools in the region to reduce the need for developmental education; identify developmental students through achievement and placement tests, counseling, and interviews; provide a comprehensive, highly structured developmental education program that

*Task Force on Developmental Education, Report on Developmental Education in Louisiana Public Higher Education, May, 1981; and Larry Tremblay, "Issues for the '80s . . . Developmental Education," The Regents Report, Vol. 7, No. 4.

includes English, mathematics, reading, study skills, tutoring, and counseling components; require that attendance in remedial courses be mandatory for developmental students; limit the time that students are given to remediate all deficiencies; delay scheduling students into regular courses requiring the basic skills as prerequisites until they can demonstrate these needed skills; select staff and faculty who are committed to developmental education and provide for their training; administer developmental education through the regular departments of instruction and administrative channels to ensure the horizontal integration of program components; and conduct an ongoing evaluation of these programs and all their components. Funding for developmental education may be requested at the rate of $69.85 per student credit hour, rather than the customary $59.46, if the institution implements an "approved program" for developmental education in accordance with the guidelines of the Developmental Education Task Force.*

The plan adopted in Oregon, more dramatic and less complex, offers another alternative for reducing the cost and need for remedial education at the postsecondary level. Beginning in 1982-83, the Legislature will require all remedial instruction in Writing and Mathematics in Oregon's four-year institutions to be self-supporting. The plan has the support of faculty at the University of Oregon and Oregon State University and, apparently, parents of high school students. Some institutions made the "lowest-level" remedial courses self-supporting in 1981-82.

In Washington, seventy thousand community college students are enrolled in 28 learning assistance and developmental education programs (1981-82). In 1979, steps were taken to establish a system to support those involved in developmental and learning assistance efforts and to improve program efficiency and cost effectiveness. The system, as currently envisioned, will eventually be comprised of six major components: The State Board for Community College Education, the newly established Washington Association for Developmental Education, resource development, staff development, task force activities (public policy, organization and management, assessment, funding, etc.), and "network" programs (resources bank, newsletters, etc.). The project has the support

*Tremblay, Ibid.

of the State Board for Community College Education. Many improvements in the system already have been made, and a public policy document, which will include a "state plan" for learning assistance support, is under development.

At the four-year level, Eastern Washington University has undertaken its own program to reduce the need to provide remedial instruction to large numbers of college-bound high school students. In addition to proficiency testing in English and mathematics, EWU has begun to inform and seek the support of principals and counselors in a campaign to encourage students to take a solid academic program while in high school. The University also is considering "placing all remedial courses on a self-supporting financial basis so that students would have to pay additional amounts if they are deficient in their basic skills when entering EWU," and removing remedial coursework from consideration for graduation credit. Other Washington colleges and universities have developed similar efforts.

Placing remedial courses on a self-supporting basis is a frequently suggested response to reducing the current demand, but as one education administrator pointed out, many of those who most need remedial instruction cannot pay their own way. (This may be a misconception; "self-sustaining," per se, does not necessarily mean substantially higher student fees.) Another funding alternative is to look to the Superintendent of Public Instruction to bear the costs of instruction for courses normally taught in high school as part of the state's commitment to full funding for basic education.

Other suggestions would include restricting remedial instruction to Washington's community colleges; they are prepared to offer it, and the cost to the student and the state would be lower. As an alternative to this, provide remedial instruction in the four-year institutions but limit the amount of remedial instruction students can take in a four-year institution, or offer it only in the summer.

3) Increase the Emphasis on Training Highly Qualified Educational Personnel. One of the most important elements in improving educational preparation is the improvement in the quality and abilities of teachers, administrators, and other educational personnel. Fluctuations in the relationship between the supply and demand for teachers should not obscure the essential role played by teacher education in facilitating or impeding

successful high school to college transition. The forthcoming Education Program Review to be conducted by the Council and its emphasis on evaluation of quality should help to illuminate and strengthen this role.

Education and the performance of the public schools are currently under intense scrutiny. Those who operate educator preparation programs are acutely aware of their role and responsibility in training high quality teachers and educational leaders, as perceived both by the public and by elementary and secondary school educators. The State Board of Education's "1978 standards" for certifying teachers, administrators, and support staff, more rigorous than the earlier standards, will have been implemented by all training institutions by the end of 1983. These increased expectations and standards already have resulted in the schools giving greater emphasis to the improvement of educator training programs.

Summary and Conclusions

The problem of ill-prepared college-bound high school graduates is not new, but it has grown and worsened as the population that makes the transition from high school to college has become larger and more diverse. All three of the major components in the state's educational system are involved, and any solution must entail a coordinated response. But the list of variables does not end with those reviewed in this report, nor is it limited to the schools and institutions alone. The higher education funding system, with its emphasis on FTE's and retention is implicated. The laudable goal of achieving a rapid redress of past social inequities through the educational system also is an important factor. The national response to the launching of Sputnik, which emphasized education, and which only now appears to be phasing down, is a third. One also can mention the campus unrest of the late 1960's and early 1970's, with the accompanying insistence on "relevant" curricula, and the problems created for higher education, as college graduates found it increasingly difficult to find appropriate employment. Demographic considerations, such as the passage of the post-World War II "baby boom" through the system, also weigh heavily. It is precisely because the issue is so complex that it is classified as a major planning issue.

Five activities which could assist in problem resolution are offered for consideration at the K-12 level: 1) implement competency testing; 2)

2) strengthen course offerings; 3) improve students' study skills; 4) tighten graduation requirements; 5) develop alternatives to current attendance and retention practices. At least three of the five were receiving the attention of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education prior to the writing of this paper. Three suggestions are offered for consideration at the college level: 1) strengthen admission requirements; 2) restrict the location and proliferation of remedial education; and 3) increase the emphasis on training highly qualified educational personnel. Each has been implemented by some institutions.

Since the Revised Plan involves the higher education sector, and its recommendations will pertain to that sector, the plan response can address only part of the problem. Similarly, without a higher education response, the steps taken in the K-12 sector will go only part of the way. The need, then, for cooperation and interaction, activities that must occur in an enlightened atmosphere, is obvious. The Council and the State Board of Education are planning a joint meeting; the subject of this paper is of obvious relevance.

With substantial numbers of students coming to college academically underprepared, the costs of remediation are high in terms of time, energy, and money. The teaching of remedial courses already may have altered the character of many of Washington's colleges and universities, placing them in the dual role of high schools and institutions of higher education. As the cost of education mounts, the demand for the effective use of resources will increase--both from those supplying the money (the state, parents, students), and from those providing the services. In the face of the need for college faculty and administrators to direct institutional resources to responsibilities of higher priority, the growth and availability of remedial services must be scrutinized and curtailed.

In taking these steps it must be recognized that student unpreparedness is not a philosophical problem for Washington's community colleges. The open-door policy permits the admission and instruction of all students, regardless of their academic preparation. The stiffening of high school graduation requirements, however, could result in larger numbers of students coming to community colleges without high school diplomas; likewise, the adoption of more rigorous admission requirements by

the four-year institutions could increase demands on the resources of Washington's community college system.

The source of many of education's problems appears to lie beyond the scope of the immediate educational environment. For whatever reasons, many students are generally unwilling to invest substantial work and effort in the learning process. Data exist, nevertheless, to show that most students in Washington decide to go to college before the 10th grade, and that of all those individuals with whom students are likely to discuss their plans for after high school, parents are the most influential. The data identify college recruiters as least influential on students' plans for after high school. These important findings strongly suggest that if some of the resources now directed almost exclusively at recruiting high school seniors were directed instead to communicating earlier to both parents and students the requirements for college adminission and success, the endeavor could be expected to yield results. Postsecondary educators and administrators clearly should consider and initiate 1) a more determined effort to enlist the support of parents in their effort to raise academic expectations and standards, and 2) an intensive campaign directed at the entire educationally related community to produce a greater appreciation of the importance of achievement in high school as preparation for college, a vocation, and life.

As this paper indicates, the question of whether or not something should be done to improve the academic preparation of Washington's high school students has been answered in the affirmative. The State Board of Education, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board for Community College Education, and many of Washington's colleges and universities are attempting to provide leadership in the drive to improve students' academic skills. The problem of underprepared students will be reduced when such measures take effect. Real problem resolution, however, depends on secondary-postsecondary collaboration, consensus, and the establishment of a united educational front. The Revised Plan, therefore, will suggest a more coordinated, cooperative approach to issue resolution.

Of the elements previously discussed, the following are singled out for priority attention:

1. Washington's four-year institutions should consider the development of new minimum college admission requirements. These should

require the completion of selected courses or demonstration of specific competencies prerequisite to the successful participation in and completion of a wide range of baccalaureate-level programs.

2. Admissions officers of these institutions should prepare materials which outline these course and competency expectations to prospective students and distribute this material to the state's high schools for their use in advising and planning.

3. Recognizing that the continuation of some remedial services in the four-year institutions is necessary, each institution should determine the extent to which these services are facilitative to or destructive of their major educational purpose and establish policies for the limitation of remedial courses and programs accordingly.

4. In determining these limitations, the granting of credit for graduation from remedial coursework should be eliminated and consideration should be given to maintaining the remaining remedial services on a self-supporting basis wherever possible.

5. Representatives from the state's two- and four-year institutions should meet to develop a coordinated response to the provision of remedial courses and programs that identifies their appropriate roles, and which provides for the transfer of students whose remediation needs exceed the limitations of the four-year sector.

6. The Council for Postsecondary Education, the State Board for Community College Education, and the State Board of Education should convene a joint meeting for the purpose of discussing, considering, and recommending these and additional measures for the improvement of the academic standards of Washington's total educational system.

It is on the basis of such individual and coordinated efforts as are outlined here that Washington's entire educational system can be strengthened and the transition from the high school to college made a productive and succesful experience.